

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 March 2021

Subject: Responding to the Needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and the children of Manchester who are affected by the European Union Settled Status Scheme

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

This report summarises the offer and outcomes being achieved in relation to our children who are affected by European Union Settled Status (EUSS), Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and all children in our care who are not British Nationals.

Attached in the appendix is a complementary report by Greater Manchester Immigration Unit (GMIAU).

Recommendations

Children and Young People Scrutiny members are invited to:

1. Consider the Council's response to UASC;
 2. Consider the progress for children who are affected by EUSS;
 3. Acknowledge the partnership work with our UASC and the issues for young people who have insecure immigration status and are entitled to leaving care support; and
 4. To note the input from Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit and their work supporting children with insecure immigration status.
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Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Effective specialist services are critical to ensuring the most vulnerable citizens are able to connect and support the drive towards a thriving and sustainable City
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Ensuring the most vulnerable in our society are given the opportunity to access and achieve in the City is supported by the delivery of a strong and cohesive partnerships.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Relationship based services help build the resilience of children and families which they need to achieve their potential and be integrated into their communities
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Improving outcomes for children and families across the city helps build and develop communities
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Specialist services support families to be successful who are then able to deliver continuing growth in the City

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

There are no background documents.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report details the support offered to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Manchester and the improved outcomes for those children, it also considers the progress made for our children who are eligible for EUSS, UASCs and our children who are not British Nationals who may have insecure immigration status. The report reflects the strong partnership approach and the joint working with GMIAU in improving outcomes for children. The GMIAU report by Amanda Shah is attached in the appendix.

2.0 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

- 2.1 At the time of the last report to this committee 7th October 2020, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) was 103 aged under 18 years, currently there are 109 children aged under 18 years and 189 aged 18-25 years. The majority of our children continue to present spontaneously in Manchester and usually present in the first instance to the police. In response to the increasing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, a specialist city wide team was established in March 2020, to build a stronger multi agency offer and deliver improved outcomes.

3.0 Progress and outcomes

- 3.1 Outlined below are the progress and outcomes being achieved in relation to our USAC children and the specific issues they experience.

3.2 Health

- 3.2.1 Children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers, can have complex health needs, requiring support from both physical and mental health services. Children who have travelled the world, often have not had the same early life care as children who have been born and raised in the UK, they may have not had immunisations, they are likely to have been living in poor unsanitary conditions in refugee camps which leaves them vulnerable to diseases that are not common in the UK.
- 3.2.2 To respond to this appropriately, all our children in addition to their standard initial health assessment have blood born virus tests and screenings. This is for diseases such as Tuberculosis and Hepatitis. UASC have the support of dedicated UASC LAC nurses who have specialist knowledge of the needs of UASC children. Our Manchester behaviours ensure as a partnership we work with children rather than doing to. We have developed young person friendly safety plans, so they feel empowered to take control of their own health needs. Our children are also registered with GPs to ensure they have all their health needs met.
- 3.2.3 This group of children have often experienced trauma of some kind. By the very nature of being a UASC they are seeking asylum which means they were not safe in their home country and have experienced challenging journeys.

Having said this, despite experiencing trauma they are not all traumatised. In considering the voice of the child, through the experiences of our children we recognised the procedure of referring to Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) does not meet the needs of all UASC and there are things that social workers, education and key workers can do to support on a day-to-day basis. Direct work addressing sleep, hygiene and support with managing emotions is delivered to all children by the social worker informed by CAMHS input. Work to support young people to understand their feelings, honouring and respecting their experiences and being able to reflect, naming their emotions is all part of the social work support to young people to understand themselves and relate that to their experiences.

- 3.2.4 There is an excellent relationship between social workers and the named lead in the looked after CAMHS team, training has been delivered to a multi-agency team to support UASC and increase understanding of need. The council, through the Migrant Children's Team, CAMHS and education have set up multi-agency consultation/ supervision arrangement to consider complex cases and agree a partnership approach. This ensures that the right children are referred to the right services at the right time. Which in turn improves the support the children receive and makes it more meaningful for them.

3.3 Education

- 3.3.1 Many of these children are very resilient and they have great aspirations and education is important to all of them. All our children want to be in education, and as most of our young people present at 16 and over, they are mostly of college age. As a council we ensure that all our children have a place in college or school, when a young person presents who is 16 and is year 11, an assessment of their needs is completed to understand whether a school or College placement is the most appropriate. The virtual school is instrumental in this and works directly with social workers, foster carers and accommodation providers to ensure an appropriate educational placement is found.
- 3.3.2 This cohort of children have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. There have been significant delays in children receiving equipment often as they are new arrivals to the UK, and the virtual school have been working with colleges to expedite this. We have ensured that all children have had access to their lessons through technology in their placements. However, English to Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and learning another language does not lend itself to virtual learning, lockdown is reducing the interactions and opportunities our children have for learning English which then restricts their move on into A Levels or other qualifications. There is support for ESOL from the third sector and the Refugee Council offer ESOL and group support which some of our young people access

3.4 Managing Risk

- 3.4.1 Manchester City Council has been part of the roll out of Operation Innerste, a joint operation from the police and the Home Office, to reduce the risk of

children going missing when first in care and to reduce the impact of traffickers and those who have been victims of modern-day slavery. The Migrant Children's team have been working directly with GMP and the lead officers to ensure a good working relationship which enables us to offer the best care from the first moment of contact with any vulnerable young person. The response from police has been excellent with these procedures being carried out across every new contact. The team are working with the Greater Manchester complex safeguarding hub to promote this way of working across the GM (Greater Manchester) authorities. Where there are concerns regarding trafficking the team work closely with Barnardo's independent child trafficking advocates to support young people ensuring safety.

3.5 Accommodation

- 3.5.1 Manchester City Council have commissioned providers who have specialist skills in working with UASC. There are a range of providers who deliver various levels of support, this offers choice to reflect the needs and abilities of a young person and supports the transition to adulthood. Having a stable and secure placement enables the other work outlined to take place. Placements are available to receive emergencies and will inform assessment.
- 3.5.2 As there is a brief period to work with UASC until they are 18 it is essential that there is a clear move on plan to leaving care. If a young person is still awaiting a decision from the Home Office, the Manchester City Council continue to support in all areas.
- 3.5.3 This group of children have been through so much; social workers regularly talk of the privilege of being able to offer them safety and improved life outcomes. We asked some young people for their feedback on their homes and being in the UK and what this offers them.

'I like in general all of UK and Manchester, also the people, they are nice and quiet. I really like the people here in Manchester and my home. I feel safe and good here. I also enjoy learning English, I started college recently. It is online but I like it. I never had laptop before, but my social worker gave it to me' - HM

'My trip to the UK was very difficult and unsafe. Now I am in Manchester everything is good. I feel safe in this house and it is very comfortable, I like all the staff here because they talk to me.' - MJA

'Before I came here, I was in France and it was dangerous, and I was very unhappy. I am much happier in Manchester; I have freedom here.' - AK

'About a year ago I came to England from Ghana on a plane, I was detained, at the time, I felt very bad. A year later I feel much better, I am safe now. I actually like the weather here and enjoy winter. I do not have my status yet but If I get it I will stay in Manchester for the rest of my life, there are lots of opportunities here, I want to study law and become a solicitor, this is the perfect place for me to do that.' - BA

3.6 Leaving Care

- 3.6.1 Leaving care provides equal opportunities for young people who have come to the United Kingdom from other countries, as far as the law permits. If the Home Office has not reached a decision on a child's immigration status by the time, they are 18, then Manchester City Council continues to support that young person financially in addition to their leaving care entitlements. This continues until such time that they receive their leave to remain and have access to benefits or they have reached the end of their appeals process and a Human Rights Assessment has been completed and no further duties are assessed as being due. Leaving care will always ensure that a young person is supported into provision by the adult services and Migrant help.
- 3.6.2 COVID has impacted on the timeliness of the decision making of the Home Office asylum claims and we have young people who have not yet been interviewed. Manchester City Council have been working with the Home Office to highlight this issue and have agreed to pilot virtual interviews, in the hope of progressing this work. GMIAU have also been supporting our challenge with this which is identified within their report. Unfortunately, not only does this delay impact upon the care planning for these children, but the stress and upset from not knowing and being in a state of limbo is having a significant impact on their emotional and mental wellbeing, in all these cases the social workers and personal advisors are writing to the Home Office to raise our concerns and advocate for our children.
- 3.6.3 Currently there are 188 young people aged 18-25, of these there are 20 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) or not in contact with their PA (Personal Adviser)., evidencing a high percentage of UASC remain in education, training, or employment post 18. There are also nine young people who are at university. UASCs do not have a family or connected person support network around them, so their relationships with professionals are essential. We reached out and asked some young people about their experience of this; DK said about his Personal Advisor *"just that you are the best, you have been helping me through home stuff and work that I don't have any idea about what they are, more important you are so kind with me."* UASCs have to learn a lot in a short period of time not only English but about life in the UK, systems, and issues that their relationships with their PAs (Personal Adviser) is essential.

4.0 European Union Settle Status (EUSS) Scheme

- 4.1 The report from Greater Manchester Immigration Aid (attached) unit breaks down the pledge regarding the recommendations, Manchester City Council has continued to support social workers who have children who are EU (European Union), EEA (European Economic Area) or Swiss nationals in their care. The support of the pledge has helped to drive forward this work. Having the capacity to address immigration needs solely has supported social worker understanding and practice in this area. The response by Manchester City Council continues to be spearheaded by the Migrant Children's Team who continue to raise awareness and review and monitor those children who are in

care, the council have continued to identify children who are subject to these arrangements.

4.2 At the time of writing the report there has been an increase in numbers as children continue to be identified. At the time of writing this report there are;

- 64 children under 18 identified as eligible for the EUSS, of that number 16 have been given settled status and 7 have pre-settled status, there are 5 children who have been adopted so have British nationality. There are current applications in place for all the other children or there is a plan for a paper application to be completed.
- There are 25 care leavers identified; 10 who have settled status and 2 with pre-settled status, there are 3 young people who have had their status declined. The rest awaiting decisions or applications are being made.

4.3 This is reviewed regularly, and continued identification of children is being carried out through questions at legal gateway and through continued awareness raising sessions. Some of our children have been declined settled and pre settled status, we have referred these children to GMIAU to receive independent legal advice about their immigration. We have raised directly with the home office our concerns about the vulnerability of this cohort and where appropriate social workers and personal advisors will write letters of support for children and young people. The reality is that the decision remains with the Home Office and if appeals are unsuccessful, these young people may be deported. Through meetings with the Home Office about EUSS we have also asked questions about those children who will miss the deadline, due to no fault of their own as their parents did not complete on their behalf. We have been given verbal reassurance that these children will be considered as vulnerable and as having extenuating circumstances, allowing for paper applications to be completed after the fact. As a council we do not only want to focus on the children who are in our care but all our Manchester children. To do this we have been reaching out to partner agencies and delivered briefings to schools, health, and multi-agency partners to encourage and promote the application with all families who will be affected by this scheme.

4.4 The work of Manchester City Council in this area has been recognised on a national level and the team have been invited to contribute to a Home Office training for social workers nationally. As we near the deadline we will continue to work to for our children to ensure they have settled or pre-settled status. This will be an ongoing project that will continue to consider the impact of immigration on a child's future. As within the report from GMIAU, we will continue to review children who are EU, EEA or Swiss nationals or those who have a right to claim through other routes.

5.0 Our Children who are looked after and are not British Nationals

5.1 Following on from the work with EUSS the spotlight on immigration has led to ongoing work with GMIAU to consider the forward planning for those of our children who are not British or EU, EEA or Swiss nationals and how we address their immigration as part of care plan and plan for permanency. Our

Permanency Policy is current under review and immigration status will be included within this review. GMIAU have recommended that British Citizenship is part of our permanency planning, Manchester is committed to ensure that we secure the immigration status for all our children in our care. Every child is unique in their own situation and nationality raises complex questions relating to identity, age and understanding in relation to development for children, their choice for themselves and what they want now and the future.

- 5.2 We are working to identify how many children are affected at this time. The report from GM IAU outlines how immigration is impacting on people in the UK and this is a new presenting issue, it is also an opportunity for Manchester to be leaders in an emerging area of practice for social work.

6.0 Summary

- 6.1 The presentation of unaccompanied seeking children within Manchester has increased over the past 5 years, Manchester's UASC children now make up over 0.07% of the total child population, indicating that as a Local Authority we are supporting a higher number of UASC. In recognition of this a specialist children's team was established in March 2020. The team deliver an effective partnership offer to better identify and meet the needs of UASC. This partnership approach supports children for their future in Manchester by drawing on a multi-agency services to support these children into a successful transition to adulthood.

7.0 Recommendations

Scrutiny Committee members are invited to:

Consider the experience of our unaccompanied children and note the partnership offer to unaccompanied children and the improved outcomes this offer delivers.

Note the progress made delivering the pledge to children in care and care leavers affected by Brexit immigration changes.

Consider the wider impact of immigration on our children.

Consider the recommendations made by the GMIAU report.